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THE STATE OF DEATH: AN INSTANCE OF INTERNAL ADAPTATION.

By Professor JAMES H. LEUBA, Bryn Mawr College.

The ordinary man is a drifting being; he swims complacently with the current. His natural business seems to be his adaptation to external circumstances, physical and moral. The reward of his supineness is usually what is accounted a fair share of success. He is a true representative of the world as seen through Darwinian spectacles.

Here and there, however, one meets a man, or a group of men, who claim to be a law unto themselves, who stand up against society as creative centers of energy, hardly condescending to accommodate themselves to physical necessities. Impelled by inner needs they strive for the realization of a type for which there is no external demand. Men such as these deserve the attention of the philosopher, particularly if he would know the purport of the forces at play in humanity.

In this paper I propose to describe, analyze, and point out the social significance of one of the most remarkable instances of the realization in an individual of an ideal in opposition both to external influences and to that, in himself, which may properly be called the *primitive man*.

There is a condition of relative simplicity of psychic life in which desires or impulses usually appear singly in consciousness and do not, therefore, enter into conflict with each other but pass on, unresisted, into action. Or, if several happen to meet, the conflict which arises is purely a matter of intensity, and not of quality. Certain things are liked more but not better. In a higher type of organization the conative movements are generally pitted against each other in a struggle for mastery on the ground of qualitative differences. In some men the impulses, inclinations and desires array themselves in two opposed groups and inner life becomes essentially the history of the defeats and of the victories of the group claiming

an absolute value. The strife, often greatly protracted and tremendously intense, ends in some of these men—Christian Mystics—in the production of a transformed personality as curious to the psychologist as practically important to society. They call it the *State of Death*. It is, in their mind, the successful result of their heroic efforts to obey inner promptings. On its practical side, it is nothing less than a serious solution given, experimentally, to the problem with which the salvation-philosophers, Schopenhauer and Hartmann, have entertained the world. It is defined thus by Jacques Olier, the founder of Saint Sulpice.¹ 'What is the State of Death? It is a state in which the heart cannot be moved in its core, and although the world offers honor, wealth and things of beauty, it is quite as if they were presented to a corpse without movement and without desire. The soul inwardly led may well be moved by external objects, but only superficially; it does not proceed from the interior which remains passive.'

Is this sheer verbiage, or is it a tolerably accurate description of a real condition not without deep significance? Let us turn to some other mystics for ampler information.

Mme. Guyon² describes minutely in her *Life* and in the *Torrents* the steps through which the soul comes to its mystical death. The 'natural' desires and impulses, together with the thoughts and images connected with them, must disappear. The 'Natural Man' must 'rot and be buried' and in the place of the passionate, assertive, eager, self-seeking person is to arise an empty, indifferent, passive creature prompted by harmonious impulses coming from beyond the self. When once the 'Natural Man' is dead, God is said to rule supreme. 'The three powers of the soul, understanding, memory and will have died.' The soul has found that 'repose in God' which Eckhart tells

¹From the *Souvenirs de jeunesse* of Renan, abbreviated.

²Mme La Mothe de Guyon (1648-1717), the propagator of Quietism in France, one of the ablest of the Christian Mystics, sorely persecuted by a party in the Gallican clergy headed by Bossuet. She differs in no essentials from the other Christian Mystics, but only in the more thorough manner with which she carries to their logical conclusions the tendencies and beliefs common to the group. She may therefore be used as its representative. A fuller study of her case will be found in my paper on Mysticism, *Revue Philosophique*, 1902, pp. 1-36.

us is the highest goal of man. 'The Self no more moves, it *is* moved.'

It ought not to be supposed that the bad desires only are to be suppressed. This self-surrender (*abandon*, of the French; *Gelassenheit*, of the German) involves the good as well as the bad. The Soul is to surrender entirely to its Saviour. The words of St. Paul must become literally true, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Thus Suzo in that amazing work, *The Book of the Eternal Wisdom*, calls the state of Salvation a *Nicht*, reached when every faculty, even reason, and not alone the lust of forbidden things, has been renounced. He warns the reader that the blessed state " 'is not for the many good people who wish from morning till night 'if God would only grant me this or that,' or, 'Would to God I were otherwise.' Resign yourself absolutely to the Will of God. In everything and in every circumstance say with Christ 'Father, not my will, but thine be done.' " And he adds, "he who desires what is outside of himself, or who sorrows because of what he finds in himself, has not yet reached the *Grund*, has not yet fully surrendered." The absence of effort, whether as striving or resisting, may be so complete as to throw the person for a certain period into a state of general automatism, and then we have the curious condition realized and described by Suzo, Ruysbroeck, St. Theresa, Mme. Guyon and many others, a peculiar trance-like state, a partial somnambulism, in which the disciple, altogether ruled by God's Will—to use his own terms—attends to his daily task more or less unconsciously.

It is evident that the significance of the transformation before us depends upon the meaning attached to that much used expression 'the Will of God.' Let us try and define it with some precision before considering further the state of Mystical Death itself. The orthodox Christian classifies the conative functions as the manifestation, either of the Will of the Natural Man or of the Will of God. The distinction exists under some name or other in all men who have reached the ethical plane. Duty, the Right, the Highest Good of the Greatest Number, etc., are respectively in different persons synonymous with the Will of God. But the meaning attached to these expressions changes somewhat with each person. Any one of the

great Christian Mystics, or, for that matter, any earnest Christian of the past or of the present, would give us accurately enough the meaning ascribed to the Will of God by the group of men under study.¹ The diagnosis made by Nicholas of Basle of the spiritual condition of Tauler is as good a concrete illustration as may be asked for.² He was 50 years old, an influential man, deservedly honored for his talents, his piety and his virtues, when Nicholas bluntly put before him his imperfections. 'Your trust is not exclusively in God and you do not seek Him alone, but you seek your own self,' said Nicholas. 'You trust in your own knowledge and in your own talents. There is vanity in you and love of ease. You are too much drawn to the creatures and, in particular, to a certain person whom you love with all your heart, immoderately. You have squandered your time in living for yourself.' That is the impeachment. Tauler must have been already aware of his deficiencies, for he pleads guilty and enters, of his own accord, upon a course of purification which none but a soul of the noblest temper could have endured. Let the outcome be what it may in this particular case, it is with the ideal that we are concerned. The goal set before Eckhart's disciple is the eradication of natural pride, of the misplaced pleasure felt, not in the achievement, but in oneself as its instrument. There is the source of evil. Therefore no more preaching to find delight in the sense of one's power and in the incense of compliments; no more discoursing to display knowledge or wisdom; no more inexact speech to call forth admiration or spurious interest; no more silence in order to keep people's good opinion when justice would require utterance; no more ambiguous smiles; no more false dignity—nothing but the unvarnished expression of the truth under the guidance of Christian charity.

After all, this ideal, the goal of our Mystics, is nothing else

¹In the first twenty-two chapters of *The Spiritual Nuptial* Ruysbroeck makes a typical picture of the virtues demanded of the Bride by the Bridegroom.

²The following is taken from an anonymous biographical account prefaced to twenty-five sermons of Tauler edited by Susanna Winkworth. It is asserted that the conversion there related is falsely ascribed to him. However that may be, its value for our purpose remains, whether it be the conversion of Tauler or of some one else.

than the Christian moral ideal taken without the usual compromises dear to the so-called practical man. And, in a wider view of the case, it is nothing more than the unflinching and consistent application of those ethical principles generally admitted, if not practiced, in civilized nations.

The significance of this ethical tendency is that it aims at replacing individual by universal motives, the private will by the larger will; it makes for action from *universalized motives*. Of all the spectacles offered by nature, I can think of none so majestic as this one: A little creature come to life with a pugnacious and even ferocious instinct of self-preservation and narrow self-increase at the expense of every one and everything, entering upon a battle to the death with his original self to transcend it, and ultimately, on the ruins of his initial nature, in an amazing act of self-renunciation, making the General Will his own and thus becoming the moral equal of God.

This lofty yearning may be as well and as strenuously expressed in the common details of life as in its larger relations. Food, dress, customs may serve to pit the individual against the universal; or, in religious phraseology, man against God. The littlest incident may be an epitome of what the ethical spirit in and out of religion strives to achieve, instead of being but a quixotic wind mill.

And now we may return to that curious State of Death and inquire first how it is brought about and, later, consider it in itself. The theory to which the Christian Mystics conform is the following.¹ It is not best to fight directly the 'Natural Man,' for the lower desires seem to feed on the resistance offered them. The creature must be passive in the hands of the Creator. 'Be content with the present moment as it brings you the eternal order of God. Whatever happens to you is God's will. Our action must be to place ourselves in condition to receive God's action. Give up every specific inclination, however good it may seem, as soon as you detect it, and place yourself in indifference, desiring God's will only. Abandon

¹ I follow chiefly and almost verbatim Mme. Guyon in *Le Moyen Court et facile de faire Oraison*, and in *Les Torrents*. A similar but less minute description would be found in Suzo and Ruysbroeck and in several of the Italian and Spanish Mystics.

yourself to his will. Self-surrender is the important thing in the Christian life; it is the key of the spiritual life. Who knows well how to surrender is on the speedy way to perfection. Whatever the soul does to support itself is an irreparable loss.' ¹

But the Primitive Will does not yield readily. It is a long road, passing through many a slough of despond, that leads to complete resignation. For the soul begins by opposing with all her might the evil that is in her instead of putting herself in passivity. She falls and falls again; moans, repents and calls for help. But God seems not to hear. The time comes when she well nigh gives up hope; then she becomes indifferent, resigned to her fate whatever it may be. Thus is worked in her a condition of utter powerlessness so that, at last, through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, the soul enters into the surpassing peace destined for those who have become clay in the hands of the Divine Potter.

When the transformation is completed, 'the soul is no more her own, she is owned; she lives of the life of God. She *is* no more; God alone is. Formerly the soul felt that the 'Natural Man' wanted to take part in what was going on and duty consisted in restraining him; now she has taken the habit of keeping motionless. She lets herself be led, unconcernedly, neither thinking nor choosing.' The fusion of the Individual and of the General Will has taken place.

What a blessed state no longer to feel the jars of desires, no longer to hear the creakings of conflicting ideas! It means the disappearance of the forefront of ordinary self-consciousness, of the painful antagonisms and irritating obstructions by which we are chiefly brought to self-consciousness. 'The heart, says Mme Guyon, is now always free, easy, contented.' There reigns an abysmal peace, so deep as to put one on the verge of non-existence. And yet the moral nature sleeps not; it has by no means lost its fine edge. The obligatoriness and the supreme worth of God's Will are as clearly present as ever. If resisted, a conflagration flares up to be quelled only by a renewed self-surrender.

¹ Passages from *Le Moyen Court* abbreviated and brought together.

The creed of these people consists of two propositions. Slave of destiny, altogether impotent and predestined, is the crushing first statement. It is, however, clothed in blessed meaning by the second: the Ultimate Intention is supremely good; therefore fear not, you may trust and surrender yourself to the workings of Nature and it will realize in you its glorious end. They do not put it quite in these words, but it is after all the meaning of their experience. Their predestination doctrine is consonant with the most radical optimism.

Put in psychological terms their programme means the withdrawal of attention from oneself, trying to become unconscious to all that passes within, to the good and the bad alike. Does not this amount to an unmitigated denial of the efficiency of effort in the moral life, and, even beyond that, to a denial of the usefulness of consciousness, on its intellectual aspect at least? These men are wooers of the instinctive, of the sub-conscious. Their whole life is a protest against the glare of consciousness; they want that intellectual darkness in which the individual light is replaced by the undifferentiated effulgence of the divine spirit. This bombastic phrase corresponds in them to something very real, to an affective tendential consciousness well described by the two words love and righteousness which characterize God in the mind of the Christian Mystics. They do not really want absolute unconsciousness, but only the suppression of the *presentational*. They would retain only the *feeling* of God's love and the general *desire* to do His will.

There is an apparent contradiction between the denial of the value of effort and the life-long strivings of the Mystics to become passive, to give up. But we may readily pass beyond the words to a meaning not in the least contradictory. Their aim is to cease worrying, cease repining, cease despairing, cease looking in the face of evil to give it battle. It involves, indeed, if you choose to call it so, an effort never to be given up, but it is an *effort to relax*, instead of an effort to contract. They say, 'let go' instead of 'grip.' Do not surrender to evil, but circumvent it by not thinking of it. There is here a real difference of procedure; the ambiguity of terms should not be allowed to conceal it.

The Mystical Death appears to us as a functional anæ-

thesia, falling upon particular regions. In Mme. Guyon it is deeper than in most other great Mystics. She is a favored subject. An hysterical temperament confers upon her histrionic possibilities hardly within reach of more stolid natures. The anæsthesia is likely to bear with particular intensity upon certain bodily functions, those most completely disregarded. Mme. Guyon, for instance, declares that her love for chastity was so great that there is nothing she would not have done for it. Nevertheless she fulfilled her duty toward her husband, but she desires the reader to know that, as to that as well as to the other organic functions, her heart and her mind are so well separated from her body that *il fait les choses comme s'il ne les faisait pas*.

One may wonder why it is that the self-resignation method should lead to the results it is intended to secure—the weakening of the primitive man and the strengthening of the *Socius*,¹ and not rather to the reverse. *S'abandonner*, means, for one, muscle-relaxation, the disappearance of the mass of tensions affecting both the visceral and the voluntary muscles, tensions which are the necessary motor side of desire. Do away with them and the desire loses its forcefulness, its aggressiveness; it is transformed into a mere idea, and ceases to exist as desire. The tensions acquire a particular intensity whenever there is opposition. That is precisely the usual condition of the Mystic with regard to all desires and impulses in disageement with the Will of God. Passivity—return to quietude—involves the disappearance of these unwelcomed activities and of the painful tension-feelings accompanying them. The practice may then be looked upon as the application of the Gospel of Relaxation to the moral life. But if self-surrender gives its quietus to the Primitive Man why does it not also prevent the expression of God's Will? Why is it precisely when the 'Natural Man's' hungers have been suppressed that the Universalized Will appears in its greatest clearness? The difficulty vanishes as soon as the *cognition* of God's Will is distinguished from the desire and the endeavor to perform it. In the silence of appeased

¹I borrow this term from Prof. J. Mark Baldwin to designate that part of the individual which implicates the social relations, as, for instance, the tendency to the universalization of action.

strife the voice of conscience may ring out in unmistakable tones, *i. e.*, the Universalized Will is apprehended. So far, relaxation is advantageous. There remains, however, the execution, and here muscle relaxation would of course bring abortion. It is unfortunately the fault into which some of the most extravagant Mystics have fallen; their quietism has not been distinguishable from indiscriminating inertness. But this is only a misapplication of the surrender-remedy. Properly used, it induces internal peace, and, as consequences, a clearer perception of the Divine Will and a readier performance of it since its antagonists have left the way clear. The concordant relation existing between the self-surrender doctrine, the Lange-James theory of the emotions and 'mind-cure' will appear to every one.

It hardly need be added, that the end sought, and more or less completely realized, by the Christian Mystics in the State of Death, is not necessarily bound up with that state. It is to be regarded as a device of a particular group of persons to give satisfaction to their dominant inner need. The degree of practical value and of reasonableness which belongs to it will probably appear clearly enough from the preceding pages.

The belief in the practical wisdom of absolute self-surrender is found in some form or other at the bottom of all the ethical religions, even in that of the Hebrews, the most stubbornly willful of all peoples. Primitive Buddhism and Islam are built upon the belief in the inefficiency of the human will and it is a dominant note in all forms of living Christianity. Were we to compare the practice of the Christian Mystics with that of representatives of primitive Buddhism, we should discover a fundamental agreement. Experience affirmed, there as here, that the mystical practice with regard to consciousness is the most efficient one in the moral life. Is it not also essentially the one which modern psychology would prescribe *under the same circumstances?*¹ In the State of Death, the mystics have produced a transformation of the individual which, whatever may be its practical value, is a serious attempt at a contribu-

¹On the usefulness of Meditation, Contemplation and Ecstasy, see my paper on Mysticism in the *Rev. Phil.*, 1902, XI, pp. 449 and ff.

tion to human development. It is an empirical solution of the salvation problem as different from that offered by Hartmann as a stage melodrama differs from real life. To deride this notable experiment under the pretext that it is the work of unbalanced brains would show ignorance and prejudice. Neither the road they have followed, nor the goal they have pursued is of their own discovery. The essential directions were already set down by Jesus and his disciples, not to go further back. The similar death to sin, and the new birth by which all things become new, are parts of Christian theology. Statements of like import are to be found in the sacred literature of other nations. The contribution of the Christian Mystic has been to bring to a logical conclusion a tendency constituting one of the dominant variation-forces in human society. Relentlessly, heroically, with the determination of fate, they have pushed to the radical solution where the rest of mankind were content with make-shifts and doubtful compromises. Theirs may not be a perfect solution; the range of their experience may have been too narrow; but as far as their own consciousness is concerned they have reached an absolute, a final, settlement. For the rest, we may well remind ourselves that in the end all is relative, and allow each man to decide for himself whether that same solution is demanded by his own nature and whether it has for him the appearance of an ultimate goal.

It remains for us before bringing this paper to a close to consider briefly the bearing of the experience we have described upon the problem of development.

The life of the Mystics teaches, more forcibly than that of any group of men known to us, that if progress is conditioned, as we are assured, by fortuitous variations and also, possibly, by changes initiated by the individual will in its endeavor to adapt itself to the external world, there is still another source of variation properly called *inner adaptation*.

Taking up first the second of these possible sources, we say that there is satisfactory evidence that the transformation we have studied is not called for by the *milieu*, at least not as usually understood. The Christian Mystics are the prey of impulses which usually set them more or less completely in

antagonism to their surroundings. Those only who seek the seclusion of a religious community may find an atmosphere responsive to their inner needs. As for the others, for instance Mme. Guyon in the greater part of her life, they are the subjects of persistent and strenuous conflicts between their own inspiration, designated as God's Will, and the demands of the World. Instead of wishing to adapt themselves to society, they strive to live by principles which make of society their enemy. Avoided, persecuted, they nevertheless press onwards, urged by a martyr-making power. They neither reflect, nor follow, but endeavor to meet the requirements of a society without existence beyond their own mind. They are self-sufficient centers of life against which neither man nor devils can prevail. And in all this they are no more than types of the so-called 'spiritual' man who, in all ethical religions, as well as outside of them, but especially in the Christian faith, opposes himself more or less completely to the World, renounces it in part and, at times, refuses to bow down before it. In the light of these facts the utter crudity of the development formula 'struggle for life' is evident. Nothing intelligible has been said until the kind of life wanted has been described. As far as the tendency we are studying is concerned, life means the death, or at least the subjection, of some of the most fundamental impulses of primitive human nature.¹

In this connection and parenthetically, we may briefly summarize the evidence offered by the seekers after Mystical Death on the much debated relation existing between pleasure and action. The Mystics are no doubt convinced that the highest happiness would accompany the realization of the end they seek. It does not follow, however, that they are moved by anticipated pleasure. Pleasure shows itself to be, in their case, a very subordinate cause of action, if it can be said to be a cause at all. Whoever has tried to put himself in the attitude of the ascetic subjecting himself to year-long tortures understands that he is actuated by other forces than the love of affective satisfaction.

¹The importance for animal evolution of the inner factor is being more and more fully recognized. Few have been as clearly aware of it as Prof. Irons. See his paper *Natural Selection in Ethics*, *Phil. Rev.*, May 1901, X, 3.

It would be the height of absurdity to say that tendencies so irresistible and so stupendously reckless as to the intensity and quantity of pain they involve, are under the sway of pleasure-pain. There is never any bargaining with hedonic values, but only duties to be done without regard to affective consequences. The principle to be accepted with all it implies may be formulated as follows: 'The nervous force which produces action is directly proportional neither to the intensity nor to the quality of the foreseen pleasure, neither is it proportional to the intensity of the desire or of the effort. In other terms, the power of action need not be, and usually is not, exactly represented in consciousness.'¹

If, on the one hand, the tendency to the universalization of action with its consequences is not called for by the demands of society as it is, but is an inner adaptation, it is not, on the other, to be looked upon as fortuitous. It is, on the contrary, a logical, necessary outcome. A full discussion of this point would lead us far afield while the space at our disposal limits us to a few words.² By *logical* and *necessary* we mean just what would be meant in the case of the formation of general, abstract ideas from particular, concrete ones. The psycho-physiologist is not at a loss to indicate in a general way how, the structure of the human nervous system being given together with perceptive experiences, general or universalized ideas are necessarily formed coincidently with new cerebral activities. The general idea can no more be said to be a fortuitous variation than the meeting of objects at the bottom of an inverted cone could be called a chance aggregation. Whatever chance there may be—if chance there is at all—is to be looked for beyond the data of our problem.

Is the inner adaptation with which we are concerned and the universalized activities it produces destined to survive? The doctrine of the survival of the fittest, as ordinarily in-

¹ Taken with slight modifications from the *Revue Philosophique*, July, 1902, p. 25.

² The interested reader will find them supplemented in a paper, hasty in many respects, written several years ago: *The Psycho-physiology of the Moral Imperative*, *Amer. Jour. of Psy.*, 1897, Vol. VIII, pp. 528-559.

terpreted, would require a negative answer. But since a changing individual makes an altering society, what is impossible at one time may be fit at another. The tendency to universalized action is general at a certain level of development. Some regard for it and a certain degree of conformity to its promptings are already now requisites of what we are in the habit of regarding as civilized life, even though the world is still an unfriendly place for those who achieve the absolute surrender of everything clashing with the universalized will. As the tendency in question is a logical, necessary product, we may, it seems, confidently predict that the world will become more and more habitable to them because more and more transformed by them. One may even foresee the day when the triumph of the Universal Will in every human breast will have solved many of the difficulties now darkening the social horizon.

As to the question of heredity this only need be said here— if acquired characters are not inheritable, then, until a chance congenital variation brings about in its own blind way what particular individuals now achieve with much labor, the world will have to rest content with social heredity.